

Additional distributional records from the central Hejaz, western Arabia – an addendum to Baldwin & Meadows (1988)

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The Hejaz, which can be defined as the area (including the Red Sea coast) between the Gulf of Aqaba (28°N) and Taif (21°N), is one of the least explored regions of the Middle East. The central Hejaz, in particular, was virtually unknown ornithologically until 1979 when Peter J. Baldwin took up employment near Yanbu al-Bahr (23° 54-59'N, 38° 11-18'E), the site for a new industrial city. His observations within 75 km of the city, up to May 1987, together with the author's, who took up residence at Yanbu in 1984, were jointly published in Baldwin & Meadows (1988), hereafter referred to as B&M. PJB left Yanbu in early 1988 but BSM remained until 12 April 1994.

BSM continued ornithological observations in Yanbu al-Sinaiyah and its hinterland and this note documents additions to the check-list, which lists 288 species, in B&M (1988). It includes all new species (23) and distinctive subspecies (4) seen within a 75 km radius of Yanbu al-Sinaiyah by the author, plus records of species (18) where there were two or fewer previous observations. All species are discussed in relation to their status elsewhere in the Arabian Peninsula. In addition, data on several new breeding species were obtained over the same period and these records will appear in the forthcoming *Atlas of the breeding birds of Arabia*.

References in the text to Greater Arabia refer to the Arabian Peninsula (or Arabia), the Levant and Mesopotamia.

A follow-up visit to the area covered by B&M, specifically to evaluate the current status of some species listed in the species accounts section, was undertaken between 10-15 February 2003.

Site details

Background

In 1975 the Royal Commission for Jubail and Yanbu was established to oversee the development of two new industrial cities – Jubail on the Arabo-Persian Gulf and Yanbu adjacent to the Red Sea. The two new cities, which were both built from scratch at coastal desert locations, were conceived as a result of a policy decision by the Government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to break away from its dependence on crude oil exports and to diversify its economy, particularly in the fields of petrochemical and metal industries. Trans-Arabian crude oil and gas pipelines were built to link the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia to the Red Sea.

Yanbu al-Sinaiyah was established on the coastal plain (Tihama) approximately 15 km south of an existing port – Yanbu al-Bahr – and at the delta of the Wadi Farah. Wadi Farah has one of the widest dry estuaries along the Red Sea and is the main wadi draining the Jebel Radwa complex (see Fig. 1). Construction of the city, plus initial landscaping that included the importation and planting of mature palms, commenced in 1977 and by 1994 the city held a daytime population of around 25,000.

Habitat zones

A) Sea-coast

The coast is low-lying and fringed by coral reefs along much of its length, with one major area of mangroves *Avicennia marina*, plus intermittent saltflats. Inland, beyond the shoreline of the coastal zone, before any acacias of the coastal plain appear, halophytic vegetation occurs in some abundance. The halophytes are frequently associated with small sand dunes created around the nucleus of a salt-tolerant plant. To the south of Yanbu the entire shoreline is dominated by such small sand-dunes and a wide Tihama but to the north the coast is broken up by two sharms (large bays formed by the erosive power of short wadis arising from the adjacent Jebel Radwa range) and many raised beaches with low coral cliffs.

The major stand of mangroves borders 11 km of coastline and covers *c.* 800 ha, which is almost entirely within the boundary of the industrial city of Yanbu and is of importance - in particular - as a breeding site for several species of herons (Meadows 1986). The trees, which are all stunted due to the high salinity and relatively low nutrient content of the Red Sea, grow at the mouths of major deltaic branches of the Wadi Farah. It is the most extensive mangrove belt along the Red Sea north of the Tropic of Cancer and three sectors have been designated as Conservation Areas where development is prohibited (Evans 1994).

B) Tihama plain and piedmont zone

Between the foothills of the mountains and the shoreline there is a coastal plain (the Tihama) about 50 km wide. The plain is a hot hyperarid desert that is virtually free of ground vegetation save after an occasional period of winter rains. If the latter have been prolonged and plants have produced seed, spring migrants such as doves, larks and buntings can occur in relatively large flocks. Widely spaced acacias do occur and in local depressions patches of halophytes can be found well inland.

Cultivation is restricted to wadis in the foothills (piedmont zone), particularly along the Yanbu al-Nakl valley, where several villages with palm groves, fed from springs, and irrigated plots using artesian water occur. A dam across Wadi Farah, which collects winter rainfall for recharging groundwater, was completed in 1983. There are no permanent rivers. The rocky foothills are covered with widely spaced acacia bushes and a ground flora of annuals is present after winter rains.

C) *Jebel Radwa*

Like the rest of the eastern side of the Red Sea the flat coastline is paralleled by a steep escarpment representing the upturned edge of the Arabian Plateau, although at the latitude of Yanbu the escarpment is broken and is represented by a series of isolated, rather than continuous, mountain ranges that rise to only around 2,000 m. The hinterland at Yanbu is dominated by the *Jebel Radwa* range with at least three peaks reaching around 2,000 m and rising vertically from little above sea-level on the seaward side but more gently on the landward flank. A few permanent springs occur and there is some *Juniperus phoenicea* scrub as one approaches 2,000 m.

Climate

The area lies within middle zone of the Saharo-Sind desert belt. Temperatures are relatively warm in mid-winter (c. 15°C) and extremely hot (> 40°C) in summer on the Tihama. However, climate in the hinterland is modified by altitude. Frost and snow may occasionally occur in winter on the higher peaks of *Jebel Radwa*, albeit snow fell only during the 1992/3 winter during the period under review. Cyclones from the Mediterranean bring scanty winter rainfall and occasional heavy rains during March-May, as, for example in 1993 (Meadows 1994a).

Yanbu's latitude is too far north to be significantly affected by the SW monsoon that brings rain from July to September to the southern Red Sea. However, the monsoons of the Indian Ocean do have a significant effect on the Red Sea wind system and thus directly affects sea water level that determines the extent of flooding of inter-tidal habitats and, in turn, the suitability of forming feeding grounds for waders (Meadows 1993a). In summer, the south-west monsoon generates a flow in a clockwise direction along the Somali and Arabian coasts towards the west coast of India. From May to September, north-northwesterly winds prevail along the whole of the Red Sea, helping its water to flow into the Gulf of Aden. In winter, the north-west monsoon generates current in the opposite direction so that, from November to March, there is a flow from the Gulf of Aden into the southern part of the Red Sea. At this time, the north-westerly winds reach no further south than 20°N, thus assisting still further the inflow of surface water into the Red Sea.

Development Phases

Over the 15 years (1979-1984) covered by B & M and this paper, the development of Yanbu al-Sinaiyah can be split into three phases, each with implications for bird-life.

The first phase involved massive earthmoving and dredging activities for the infrastructure of the port and adjacent city. Water was supplied by desalination barges and to a lesser extent from treated groundwater, and the first plant nurseries were established.

From an ornithological point of view the most important activity during the main construction period of the industrial city between 1979 and 1984 was the provision

of temporary housing and resultant generation of wastewater plus extensive de-watering for laying foundations and underground infrastructure – both these activities (sewage generation and de-watering) formed artificial wetlands on a massive scale. Natural fresh-water wetlands in the central Hejaz are normally insignificant.

Sewage was dealt with either by the provision of several package mechanically-operated plants (based on activated sludge or rotating disc filters) that, however, generally produced poor quality effluents that were discharged either directly to the desert or on to coastal salt pans prior to eventually entering the Red Sea or, for some developments, such as the pioneer community village (Al Awaell), by algal stabilization lagoons. Algal lagoons created wetland habitat directly but one major discharge of the former type (a combination of cooling water, brine and sewage effluent) flowed on to a salt pan adjacent to mangrove Conservation Area # 2 that formed a vast area (c. 500 ha.) of shallow nutrient rich water with a depth normally between 1-30 cm and it attracted large numbers of wetland species, especially ducks, gulls and pipits. At this time (1981-4) a temporary breeding colony of Spoonbills *Platalea leucorodia* was established in adjacent mangroves. Dredging activities also created two small artificial islands that were rapidly colonized by terns.

1984-7 can be considered an intermediate period with the commissioning of permanent advanced wastewater treatment plants, which included tertiary treatment, enabling direct discharge to the Red Sea or re-use of water for irrigation. The majority of man-made wetlands disappeared during this period. However, extensive landscaping was commenced at this time, particularly within the community area, and Yanbu al-Sinaiyah was transformed into a garden city. Palm Doves *Streptopelia senegalensis* and Yellow-vented Bulbuls *Pycnonotus xanthopygos* – two species already breeding at an oasis in the hinterland – started nesting in 1983 and 1984 respectively while Black Bush Chats *Cercotrichas podobe*, a species that also breeds in the hinterland, first arrived in the city in 1986 and were breeding by 1993.

Between 1987 to 1994 landscaping in Yanbu al-Sinaiyah became fully mature – lawns became established, and many fruit trees and shrubs commenced flowering and fruiting (see references to Redwing *Turdus iliacus*, Pygmy Sunbird *Antheptes metallicus* and Amethyst Starling *Cinnyricinclus leucagantes*). Golden Orioles *Oriolus oriolus* nested during this period and other species suspected of breeding included Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla*, Olivaceous Warbler *Hippolais pallida*, Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata* and Masked Shrike *Lanius nubicus*. Also, Pallid Swifts *Apus pallidus* had colonized tall buildings in both Yanbu al-Sinaiyah and Yanbu al-Bahr. Apart from the last and Olivaceous Warbler these are normally associated as summer breeding species in the more verdant Levant.

In the hinterland the dam constructed in 1983 resulted in a recharge of the local groundwater during this period; new wells were constructed with a corresponding commencement of agricultural development for horticultural crops. No large-scale commercial pivot sprinkler systems were developed (Jennings 1999) but new irrigated fields, which were developed by local farmers in the Yanbu al-Nakl valley, were created (probably responsible for first records of African Silverbill *Euodice cantans*).

The number of livestock also increased and three huge grain stores, attached to barley packing plants on the outskirts of Yanbu al-Bahr, were also a post-1987 development (see references to Spanish Sparrow *Passer hispaniolensis* and Trumpeter Finch *Bucanetes githagineus*). Although much of Yanbu Al-Bahr remained unsewered a *de-facto* sewage farm was created on the fringe of the town by the development of flooded canalized grass plots for treating cesspit effluents. Salt pans at Yanbu al-Bahr were still present in 1994 although commercial production had ceased three years earlier (the site had been reclaimed by 2003 when it was also noticed that the site was marked out for housing development).

Study Area

The recording area from a 75 km radius of Yanbu al-Sinaiyah was chosen because residents in the city could only travel within this distance without obtaining a travel authorization from the government. This restriction has now been lifted.

Coverage

The records listed in this paper were obtained mainly on an *ad-hoc* basis. A daily log of birds seen on walks within the landscaped community area of Yanbu al-Sinaiyah, which covered morning, midday and evening, was maintained, as well as regular visits – associated with employment duties - to industrial facilities, utilities and the three mangrove conservation areas, while Conservation Area # 1 was also normally visited daily after 1600 hours during peak periods of migration. Mist-netting at Conservation Area # 1 was undertaken monthly between April – December 1993 in connection with a population study of Mangrove Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus avicennia* (Meadows 1999). A 3 h coastal boat trip to inshore water on the seaward side of the fringing reef at the 20 m depth contour along the length of the industrial city was carried out weekly. The entire shoreline was surveyed annually, using a 4-wheel drive vehicle each May-June, to check on numbers of nesting Saunders' Little Tern *Sterna saundersi* and three surveys of islets, which were used by five other species of nesting terns, north of Yanbu al-Bahr were undertaken in 1993 (Meadows 1993a). During the winters of 1991/2 and 1992/3, wader counts were undertaken along the coastline of the recording area. Relatively small numbers of shorebirds confirmed earlier results (Meadows 1993a); the low nutrient input by any land-based runoff, compared to the Saudi Arabian sector of the Arabo-Persian Gulf, almost certainly being responsible.

All visits to the hinterland were carried out at weekends. However, compared to the period covered in B & M the number of visits into the hinterland did increase – particularly to the valley of Yanbu Al-Nakl. Apart from two nocturnal trips (specifically for purpose of locating owls) all visits were made during daylight hours. Access to the interior was mainly via local roads through the desert, mostly unpaved and along wadi systems (Fig. 1).

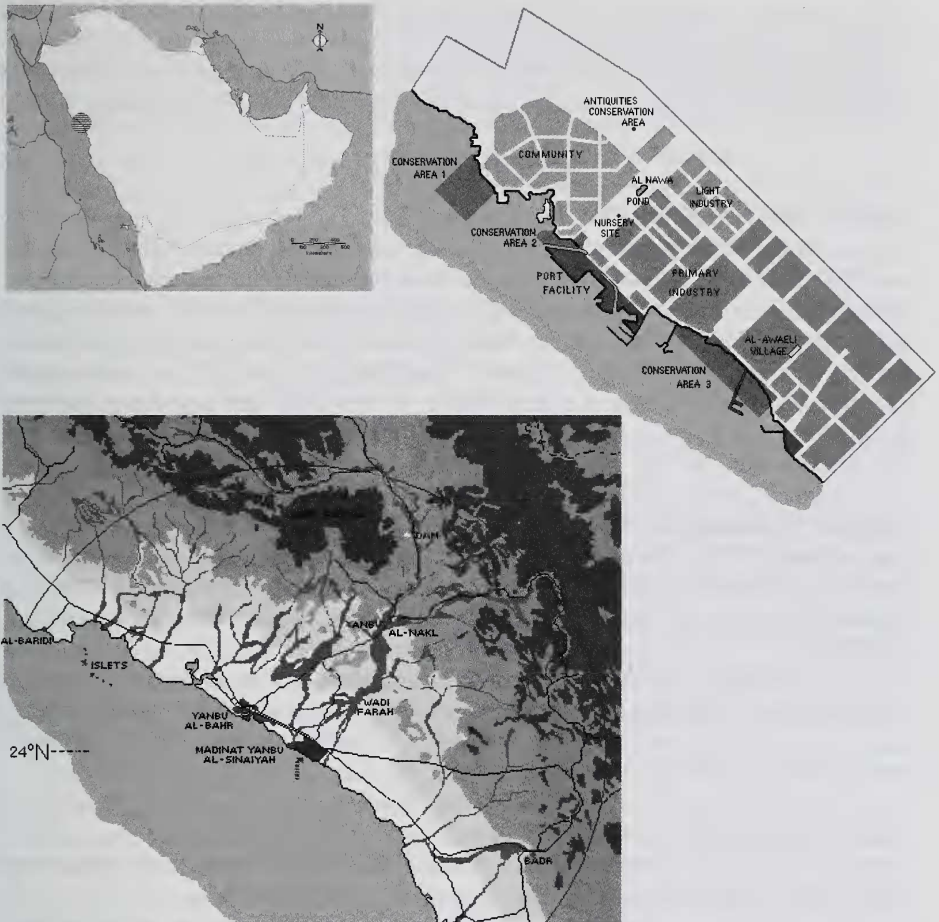


Figure 1. Localities mentioned in the text and road network in the hinterland.

Further attempts (see B & M) to reach peaks at a level of 2,000 m on the Jebel Radwa range were not undertaken between 1987-94 but numerous visits to an equivalent juniper zone at 2,000 m on Jebel Figrah (see Evans 1994), which is just outside the recording zone, were made.

Field Identification Criteria

Notes on features relevant to identification were always made prior to reference to any literature. Hollom *et al.* (1988) became available in 1988 and was used as an identification aid in the field in preference to Heinzel *et al.* (1974). Porter *et al.*

(1974) remained valuable for field identification of raptors. During 1991-94 the guide by Lewington *et al.* (1991), which proved useful for central Asian species, was also normally taken in the field. However, no species new to Saudi Arabia was discovered between 1987-94. There is, to date, no national records committee in Saudi Arabia.

Species accounts

GREAT CRESTED GREBE *Podiceps cristatus*

One on the Al-Nawa pond from 21 December 1989 to 10 January 1990, five on the sea 50 km north of Yanbu al-Bahr on 11 December 1992. Not recorded by B & M. The species is a winter visitor in small numbers all along The Gulf and Red Sea – south to at least 20°N. On present evidence it is far less scarce on The Gulf than on the Red Sea, and on the former it is more abundant in the northern sector than in the southern half. In the north a concentration of over 100 birds has been observed (Bundy *et al.* 1989) and it has recently been proved to breed at a freshwater site near the coast (Lobley 2000).

RUDDY SHELDUCK *Tadorna ferruginea*

One at Wadi al-Farah Dam on 14 February 1992 and six on a wastewater evaporation pond at an industrial facility within MYAS on 10 January 1993. B & M cited six sightings in 1982 and 1986 but these were believed to have referred to only two individuals.

It is an erratic winter visitor to the Arabian Peninsula in small numbers (rarely in double figures), usually preferring freshwater to coastal waters. A small breeding population in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia (Bundy *et al.* 1989) is probably now extinct (pers. obs.)

LAMMERGEYER *Gypaetus barbatus*

Yanbu al-Nakl, an immature on 16 September 1988. B & M reported an immature at Wadi Farrah Dam on 9 August 1985. This was the only record.

The species is a much reduced resident in the highlands of western Arabia from Yemen to the Jordanian border, generally over 2,000 m (Jennings 1995). Most records away from known breeding haunts are wandering immatures; young birds appear to be dispersive (Shirihai *et al.* 2000).

GRIFFON VULTURE *Gyps fulvus*

Yanbu al-Nakl, single birds (all juveniles) on 4 November 1988, 21 January 1990 and 2 February 1990. One record in B & M. The above were probably local birds as there is no evidence of any southward passage along the piedmont zone or Tihama (Meadows 2001).

The species is resident in central, western and south-western regions of the Arabian Peninsula. Griffon Vultures were seen on virtually all visits between 1988-94 to Jebel Figrah (just outside the recording area), where they could possibly breed.

NORTHERN GOSHAWK *Accipiter gentilis*

An immature in the Community Area of MYAS on 10 November 1991. The bird was found in a small park and later seen almost overhead as it left its perch and flew off into the distance. A very large brown *Accipiter*, much larger than Eurasian Sparrowhawk *A. nisus* with a Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo* wing-span (present in the same area for comparison) and greater bulk across the chest; also a more protruding head and neck, and a short broader tail with a rounded tip. The underparts were streaked. There is a single late September record in B & M, albeit with the caveat that the bird could have been an escape, as the species is used in falconry.

Northern Goshawks are now reported in most years on the Arabian Peninsula, mainly between October and February (e.g. Bundy *et al.* 1989, Stagg 1991). In Riyadh it was not positively identified prior to 1987 but subsequent records suggest it is a winter visitor and spring passage migrant. Most records of Northern Goshawks in the Middle East are immatures.

LEVANT SPARROWHAWK *Accipiter brevipes*

Levant Sparrowhawks were identified over Yanbu along the western Arabian raptor fly-way (Meadows 2001) in the autumns of 1987 (one 31 September), 1988 (16 on 12 October, one on 13 September and two on 14), 1990 (70 on 29 September) and 1992 (one on 24 September). Silhouette more falcon-like than Eurasian Sparrowhawk *A. nisus* due to more slender and pointed wings. Some of the birds were adult males, which were seen directly overhead, and had white underparts contrasting with black tips to wings. All were seen soaring. The record of 70 birds consisted of a dense flock moving rapidly south over the piedmont zone in the hinterland while the remainder were seen over MYAS. Not recorded in B & M.

The species is a long-distance migrant with the main autumn movement from the West Palearctic to Africa through the Levant and crossing into Africa via the Gulf of Suez, with the reverse in spring. Most Levant Sparrowhawks therefore bypass the Arabian Peninsula. However, the above records show that, at least in some years, the species also uses the raptor flyway in western Arabia (Meadows 2001). The latter supplement other October records from further south, during 1979 and 1985 in north Yemen (Phillips 1982, Brooks *et al.* 1987) plus several records (also in October) during 1985 and 1987 of birds across the Bab-el-Mandeb (Welch & Welch 1988). Elsewhere on the Arabian Peninsula there are ten records from Kuwait, which includes five on 21 September 2000 (*per* Balmer & Betton 2002), and there is a single spring record from the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia (Bundy *et al.* 1989).

MERLIN *Falco columbarius*

Yanbu al-Sinaiyah, male, possibly *F.c. pallidus* as indicated by very pale blue-grey coverts and whitish underparts, 3 December 1991. One previous winter record (B & M).

Merlins are scarce (1-9 individuals reported annually) winter visitors to north-eastern Arabia albeit only twice as far south as Bahrain, and central Arabia. In western

Saudi Arabia there are additional records from Tabuk and Jeddah (Jennings 1983), plus observations at Hodeidah and Aden in Yemen (Ennion 1962, Brooks *et al.* 1987). The Jeddah bird was apparently a specimen record of *pallidus*. One 70 km north of Riyadh (25° 30'N, 49° 30'E) also a male *pallidus* (Stagg 1991) and one at Hofuf (25° 20'N, 49° 38'E) was also assigned to *pallidus* (Bundy *et al.* 1989).

SOOTY FALCON *Falco concolor*

One flying over the Industrial City towards the coast on 1 July 1990 and one disturbed from mangroves within Conservation Area 1 on 29 September 1992. Both birds were adults. Once previously (B & M).

Breeding summer visitor to islands of the Red Sea, southern Arabia and The Gulf north to the Hawar Islands; also occasionally inland. The species normally nests on cliffs but Gaucher *et al.* (1995) reported on one Red Sea site where birds were found nesting on the ground (36-52 pairs) on raised coral reef islands covered by halophytes, fringed by a belt of mangroves *Avicennia marina*. The area was close to a site where migrating birds are claimed to be concentrated. The mangroves at Yanbu are also used by many migrants in autumn (Meadows 1992) but despite regular visits to these mangrove stands sightings were restricted to the above, indicating that the species is absent as a breeding bird from this section of the Saudi Arabian coast.

COMMON CRANE *Grus grus*

An adult (photographed) along a dry wadi within Yanbu al-Sinaiyah on 18 November 1990, and three flying over on 19 February 1992. The photograph has been deposited in the photo-library of the Royal Commission for Jubail and Yanbu, Yanbu Project. Not recorded by B & M.

Common Cranes are rare winter visitors to the Arabian Peninsula, usually singly, and the only records of flocks of over 10 birds are of 30 at Wadi Mawr in north Yemen (Brooks *et al.* 1987) and 22 at Al-Hasa in Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia (Evans 1994). The closest regular wintering grounds are in Jordan but larger numbers winter in Sudan and on the Ethiopian Plateau. However, unlike the Demoiselle Crane *Anthropoides virgo*, which is numerous on passage over western Arabia in autumn and spring to and from wintering grounds along the Nile in Sudan (e.g. Newton & Symens 1993), Common Cranes by-pass the Arabian Peninsula on passage.

BLACK-WINGED PRATINCOLE *Glareola nordmanni*

No records in B & M. Yanbu al-Bahr, four seen by BSM and I. Vickors on 1 October 1993. The birds were tame and seen at close range on the ground and in flight at a desert landfill site. Diagnostic features separating it from Collared Pratincole *G. pratincola* included black underwing coverts (seen at all light angles), lack of any white trailing edges to secondaries and no contrast between flight feathers and coverts plus darker upperparts.

The Black-winged Pratincole is a transequatorial migrant and most birds are believed to overfly the Arabian Peninsula. In contrast to *G. pratincola*, which is of annual occurrence and often occurs in large concentrations (>100 birds), it is a rare passage migrant throughout Greater Arabia. In western Arabia the species had previously been observed passing over Jeddah in April (Trott 1946), but the above was the first autumn record for western Arabia until 1996 when single birds were reported at Taiza and Aden in Yemen during October (*per* Davidson & Kirwan 1997).

PACIFIC GOLDEN PLOVER *Pluvalis fulva*

Two winter records. One on sludge-drying beds at the Industrial Wastewater Treatment Plant on 14 January 1989 and one along the shore near Conservation Area 2 on 7 January 1993. Not recorded by B & M.

The current status of this species has been revised in recent years partly due to the fact that many earlier records in Arabia could have been the result of misidentification with European Golden Plover *P. apricaria*. Apart from completely different profile at rest due to slimmer neck plus longer legs and, in flight, longer and narrower wings, supercilia on both above birds was much more prominent than in European Golden Plover. Jennings (1981) described the Pacific Golden Plover as an uncommon migrant and winter visitor to The Gulf but had no records from central Arabia or the Red Sea coast. In addition to the above winter sightings at Yanbu it has now also been identified in Riyadh – once in winter and on autumn passage between 23 July – 18 October (Stagg 1991). Also, an average of four a year are now usually found each autumn in Israel where European Golden Plover is a relatively common winter visitor (Shirihai 1996). It is a regular winter visitor and passage migrant on Bahrain (Hirschfeld 1995) with a peak in late September and October, and the latter is also the case on the adjacent Saudi Arabia coast (*pers. obs.*). A few reach as far south into Africa as coastal Kenya annually (Britton 1980).

NORTHERN LAPWING *Vanellus vanellus*

One flying low over MYAS on 11 November 1987. B & M listed two personal records involving a singleton in December and two birds in September. An additional record by J. Gasperetti of one in March was also included.

Jennings (1981) stated that the species was an uncommon winter visitor in Saudi Arabia. However, with the development of extensive pivot irrigation, particularly in the Northern Deserts of Eastern Province (*pers. obs.*, *contra* Bundy *et al.* 1989) and central Arabia (Stagg 1991) flocks of up to 100 birds now occur annually in winter.

GREY PHALAROPE *Phalaropus fulicarius*

A female in breeding plumage on salt-pans at Yanbu al-Bahr on 5 June 1987. Not recorded between April 1979 and May 1987, albeit an impression of this bird was published in an appendix in B & M.

Porter *et al.* (1996) considered the species' status throughout Greater Arabia as a vagrant. Out of eight published records for Saudi Arabia three have been females in early June.

BRIDLED TERN *Sterna anaethetus*.

Not recorded between April 1979 and May 1987 (B & M). This species was breeding on islets north of Yanbu al-Bahr on 18 June 1993, with a tentative estimate of *c.* 150 nesting pairs on one islet and *c.* 25 pairs were feeding chicks at a second islet (Meadows 1993). Bridled Terns usually keep well offshore. However, there were observations from or close to the shore at MYAS: a party of five on 1 July 1993 and single birds on 28 June 1993, 26 July 1987, 13 August 1993, and 19-21 August 1993.

This tern is a summer visitor to all coasts of the Arabian Peninsula, nesting colonially on islands.

BLACK TERN *Chlidonias niger*

One at Al-Nawa pond on 1 November 1990. B & M list one record, also in November. Black Terns are rarely observed (*c.* 30 records) in Arabia. Cramp *et al.* (1977-93) stated that even eastern populations move south-west in autumn and the reverse in spring with most birds wintering in West Africa. However, there is a small regular passage through the eastern Mediterranean (Shirihai 1996) and birds have been recorded along the Nile Basin as far south as Lake Victoria (Britton 1980).

NODDY *Anous sp.*

Three all-dark terns seen by Dr. G. Lobleby and BSM over the Red Sea north of Yanbu al-Bahr on 18 June 1993 were probably Brown Noddies *A. stolidus* (Meadows 1993b). Not recorded in B & M.

The Brown Noddy is a breeding summer visitor to the southern Red Sea, Arabian Sea and Gulf of Oman. Non-breeding birds have reached as far north as Al-Wedj (26°15'N, 36° 27'E).

CHESTNUT-BELLIED SANDGROUSE *Pterocles exustus*

One female with nine Lichtenstein's Sandgrouse *P. lichtensteinii* on the Tihama 12 km north-east of Yanbu al-Bahr on 14 July 1989. Not included in B & M albeit on at least three occasions single, relatively bulky sandgrouse with long tail streamers, which may have been this species, were observed in silhouette at dusk in 1984 and 1985 at an abandoned village described in B & M. The birds were seen arriving with other sandgrouse to drink at wells.

The species is currently known as a resident of coastal and lowland (below 1,000 m) areas of the southern half of the Arabian Peninsula from the Gulf of Oman to the Red Sea coastal belt. Hitherto, it had been recorded on the Red Sea coastlands as far north as Rabigh 22° 45'N, 39° 00'E (Bates 1936-37 and pers. obs.) and there is also an inland population in the vicinity of Medina (Jennings 1995 and pers. obs.).

AFRICAN COLLARED DOVE *Streptopelia roseogrisea*

First confirmed record was of a singleton at Wadi al-Farah Dam on 27 May 1988. Subsequently 11 additional records of 1-2 birds up to 5 July 1993, with hinterland records from the vicinity of Badr Mosayid and Yanbu al-Nakl, plus several sightings within MYAS during the same period.

Not previously positively identified (B & M) but had almost certainly been overlooked in the hinterland. First confirmed record was based on disyllabic call-note, which was quite distinct from tri-syllabic call of Eurasian Collared Dove *S. decaoto*, also more white on edge of black collar that was particularly broad on sides of neck, whiter lower belly and undertail coverts.

The species occurs in western and southern Arabia. Apparently a breeding summer visitor to much of its range (Jennings 1995) although probably resident on the southern Tihama. Records at Yanbu all fall between May and September, save one in December. Many records in western Arabia are much further north and east than formerly known but this may have been because many areas had only occasionally or had never been visited in the past, rather than due solely to a range expansion as a result increased agricultural development. The latter is certainly the case for two other doves (Laughing Dove *S. senegalensis* and Namaqua Dove *Oena capensis*). In support of the former, however, there are earlier records from Badr Mossayid and one from just outside the recording area near Rayyis, 80 km south of MYAS (Goodman & Jennings 1988).

EURASIAN COLLARED DOVE *Streptopelia decaocto*

Ten additional records of 1-2 birds between 11 June 1987 and 10 January 1991. All occurrences were within the Industrial City. In 2003, however, BSM found that the species was also present in Yanbu al-Bahr. B & M list two records – the first was an immature in November 1984 that remained until February 1985. At the time these were the first records of the species in western Arabia, as the species did not reach Jeddah until 1986 (Goodman & Jennings 1988). Eurasian Collared Doves are recent colonists of the Arabian Peninsula; they were first recorded in Kuwait in about 1963 and subsequently expanded their range into north, central and eastern Arabia (Jennings 1995).

GREAT SPOTTED CUCKOO *Clamator glandarius*

An October observation of a single bird in mangroves was the only record in B & M. One additional autumn record and five spring records: one on 27 July 1989, one on 24-27 February 1990, two on 31 March 1990 and one on 29 April 1990, single birds on 9 and 11 March 1994. The autumn bird was seen in mangroves at Conservation Area 1 and the last bird near the Holiday Inn Hotel near Yanbu al-Bahr. The remainder were found within the Community Area in MYAS.

Scarce passage migrant in western Arabia, but vagrant elsewhere in Arabia (Porter *et al.* 1966). Also, three specimens collected at Zeima (21°35'N, 40°06'E) in January 1945 (Goodman and Jennings 1988) and a record of overwintering at Tabuk (F.J.

Walker in Jennings 1981) suggest that it may winter locally in western Arabia. Migrants appear in coastal Eritrea in November and stay until March (Moreau 1972).

BARN OWL *Tyto alba*

Four or five records of single birds in the Community Area of the Industrial City on 17 January 1989, 17 January 1992, 6 July 1993 and 28-29 July 1993, and 25 September 1989. Also once at Yanbu al-Nakl on 6 April 1989. B & M had two records from the Industrial City but none from the hinterland.

The Barn Owl is likely to prove to be a relatively common resident over most of the Arabian Peninsula but it is rarely seen. Current distribution is mapped in Jennings (1995).

STRIATED SCOPS OWL *Otus brucei*

Observations during the period under review confirmed that this species is a not infrequent winter visitor to Yanbu, frequently hunting in the vicinity of streetlights: one on 21 January 1990, ten definite sightings (including two together) between 2 January and 2 February 1991, singletons on 29 January and 7 February 1992, One on 7 February 1993. All birds were seen within the community area of MYAS. Confusion with Scops Owl *Otus scops* was eliminated on all occasions: the majority were adults having much greyer underparts that were distinctively streaked black with no obvious vermiculations. B & M listed one December record.

The species has, hitherto, been considered a vagrant in Arabia. There are four records from Bahrain (Nightingale & Hill 1993) but it was not definitely identified in eastern Saudi Arabia until the author found a dead bird at Jubail in December 1994 and another (also at Jubail) was mist-netted and seen by BSM on 9 February 1995 (*per* Kirwan 1995). It has not been recorded in Kuwait (Anon. 2001) and there are no records from the Riyadh area (Stagg 1991). The subspecies *exigus* has been obtained in Bahrain and the 1995 Jubail bird was also probably this subspecies. On the other hand plumage of birds seen in Yanbu (less silver-grey) were considered to be closer to *O.b. obsoletus*. *O.b. pamela*, which is a resident breeder in UAE and Oman, is considered a subspecies of Senegal Scops Owl *O. senegalensis* (Shirihai 1996).

The species is almost certainly overlooked and the above records indicate it is probably a fairly regular winter visitor to the central Hejaz.

LITTLE OWL *Athene noctua*

One in the foothills of Jebel Radwa on 6 November 1987. Not recorded in B & M, although the above record is not surprising as it had been known to be present on nearby Jebel Figrah since 1986.

It is a widespread resident on mountains and in semi-desert areas throughout the Arabian Peninsula (Jennings 1995).

NUBIAN NIGHTJAR *Caprimulgus nubicus*

Two records from within MYAS – one (a road kill) on 24 June 1988 and one on 26 April 1991. B & M had one July record (also a road kill) from the hinterland; the specimen was handed over to Dr. Hassan Felemban of King Abdulaziz University, Jeddah.

The Nubian Nightjar is a breeding summer visitor (a few are resident) to sandy deserts with scattered vegetation on the Arabian Peninsula, where it is restricted to the Tihama and eastern fringes of the western highlands. The literature (e.g. Porter *et al.* 1996) indicates a gap between the Levant and south-west Arabia but such a discontinuous distribution is almost certainly erroneous as in addition to the above records BSM has found the species in suitable habitat elsewhere in the central Hejaz and north-west Arabia.

EGYPTIAN NIGHTJAR *Caprimulgus aegyptius*

One in a small park in the Community Area at MYAS on 16 October 1992. B & M recorded this species on one occasion – a presumed early spring migrant in late February 1985.

The species is a regular, albeit scarce, spring and autumn migrant throughout the Arabian Peninsula with some wintering in Oman and Yemen. However, it is almost certainly overlooked due to its crepuscular behaviour, as indicated by recent records from Kuwait – 20 shot at two localities in September 1999 (Gregory 2000), and in the UAE where up to 15 apparently present at one site during September-October 2001 (*per* Balmer and Betton 2002).

ABYSSINIAN ROLLER *Coracias abyssinicus*

An adult was present in the grounds of a nursery (usually to be found at top of a large eucalyptus tree) within the Industrial City from 6-20 July 1993 (also seen by I. Vickors). Easily separated from European Roller *C. garrulus*, which has once summered at Yanbu, by having outer tail feathers forming two long narrow streamers and much paler face. The occurrence followed an unusually wet spring at Yanbu and coincided with a plague of locusts. Not recorded in B & M.

This Afro-tropical species is also resident on the Tihama and foothills of western Arabia, to a latitude of 18°N. In Africa, where it breeds south of the Sahara east to Ethiopia and west Somalia, some are resident while others are well-defined rains migrants, being present as non-breeding visitors for the duration of the dry season. The above bird could have been such a migrant since there are records from Egypt and Libya at a similar latitude to Yanbu (Fry *et al.* 1988).

ARABIAN WOODPECKER *Dendrocopos doriae*

One in open acacia woodland east of Yanbu al-Bekaa at boundary of recording area on 9 October 1992. Also at 1,900 m in junipers on Jebel Figrah on 5 April 1991, just outside of the recording area. These records represented a northerly range extension of 50 km for this Arabian endemic at the time. Not recorded in B & M.

Three out of the eight endemic species of south-west Arabia reach the latitude of Yanbu al-Sinaiyah but this was the only one recorded between 1979-1994 within 75 km. However, the Arabian Serin *Serinus rothschildi* may occur in the future as it has become a common visitor to gardens in Medina at 28° 28'N, 39° 32'E (pers. obs.) and although it has not spread across the Tihama anywhere within its range it could reach the acacia woodland of the piedmont foothills, as in the case of the Arabian Woodpecker. The Arabian Red-legged Partridge *Alectoris melanocephala* has also been discovered on Jebel Figrah at 1,900 m (pers. obs.) but the species can occur down to sea-level.

COMMON REDSTART *Phoenicurus phoenicurus*

B & M reported the Common Redstart as a regular passage migrant in spring (March-May) and autumn (September-November) but records referred to the nominate race. Two males of the white-winged race *samamisticus*, which breeds mainly from Turkey east to Iran, occurred together with a heavy fall of nominate birds on 17 April 1993 at Conservation Area 1 (Meadows 1994a). Single males of the same race were also seen in the Community Area of MYAS on 19 March 1991 and 12 April 1994. In eastern Arabia where *samamisticus* is regular in spring most birds pass through in March (Hirschfeld 1995 and pers. obs.), and normally outnumbers the nominate race at this time of the year. It has been recorded passing Riyadh in March and early April (Stagg 1991).

STONECHAT *Saxicola torquata*

B & M recorded the Stonechat as a regular spring (February-May) and autumn (September-December) migrant. Subspecies were not differentiated in the text, although *rubicola* was considered the most common. 'Siberian' Stonechats were never positively identified until the autumn of 1987 although, in retrospect, it cannot be excluded that two reported winter records of Whinchat *S. rubetra* in B&M were incorrectly identified 'Siberian' Stonechats.

Stonechats of the *maura/variegata/armenica* group were confirmed as regular double passage migrants with peaks in November and March. Extreme dates in autumn were 25 October to 30 November and in spring from 22 February to 28 March. One distinctly marked individual remained in a dry wadi with halophytic vegetation for five days in November and another stayed in BSM's garden for seven days in March.

There was a total of 21 records involving at least 42 individuals between 1987 and 1994, including a fall of 16 birds on 3 November 1993. Based on the presence of much white at base of tail, several individuals, particularly during the autumn of 1990, were considered to be *variegata*.

The race *maura* has been recognized as a regular winter visitor to eastern and central Arabia (Hirschfeld 1995, Richardson 1990, Stagg 1991) with *armenica* and *variegata* as passage migrants. The last two races winter in north-east Africa from the Sudan to the Somali Peninsula; both reach Eritrea and Ethiopia but *variegata* is

the most abundant (Urban & Brown 1971) and is the only subspecies reported as far east as Somalia (Moreau 1972).

CYPRUS PIED WHEATEAR *Oenanthe cypriaca*

Two spring records. A female on 4 March 1989 in Conservation Area # 1 and a male at a landfill site near Yanbu al-Bahr on 7 March 1994. These records are not surprising in view of its assumed migration route through the Middle East to wintering grounds in Sudan and Ethiopia (Shirihai 1996). Nevertheless, they appear to be the first along the Red Sea coast of Saudi Arabia for over 60 years (Bates 1936-37). Both birds were in breeding plumage: considered to be slightly smaller than Pied Wheatear *O. pleschanka* (an individual in 1994 had been seen 3 days earlier) and with narrower white rump, rusty-buff underparts below a black throat. The 1989 bird had brown upperparts and a dark crown was bordered by a distinctive whitish stripe.

RED-TAILED WHEATEAR *Oenanthe xanthopyrmyna*

A male of the nominate race in the Community Area of MYAS 3-4 March 1991. The bird was seen on a lawn in a small park and was immediately identified from *O.x. chrysopygia* by its black throat and black sides of head that merged with blackish-brown leading wing coverts, a prominent eye-stripe plus white sides to tail that gave a far less dull-looking appearance. Points of separation from a male Red-rumped Wheatear *O. moesta* included rufous rather than orange rump, blackish brown crown and nape, and lack of prominent white edges to flight feathers. B & M described this species as a scarce migrant, more frequent in spring than autumn with November and December records from the hinterland. However, as in much of the literature at the time (e.g. Jennings 1981), subspecies were not mentioned.

Two subspecies are recognized but most of the breeding range is occupied by *O. x. chrysopygia*, with the nominate form being confined to a much smaller and more westerly area (includes E. Turkey and NW Iran) and this difference is reflected in the latter's more westerly distribution in winter. *O. x. xanthopyrmyna* passes through the Levant and apparently winters in Egypt, where *chrysopygia* was unrecorded until 2001 (per Balmer & Betton 2002) and along the Red Sea coast of the Sudan along with *chrysopygia*. In Eritrea only *chrysopygia* (Moreau 1972) is present. The subspecies that occurs as a migrant through Arabia and individuals wintering on the Arabian Peninsula are almost exclusively *chrysopygia*. Rahmani *et al.* (1994) listed only *chrysopygia* from the Tihama between Jeddah and Jizzan.

MOURNING WHEATEAR *Oenanthe lugens*

Observations during the period under review produced ten records in 1988, 1989, 1990, 1992 and 1994 with a monthly distribution, as follows: October (1), November (3), January (1), February (2) and March (3). Extreme dates: 28 October and 18 March.

BSM found a hitherto unknown population of Mourning Wheatear breeding at Madain Salah (26°45'N, 40°42'E) in 1986 and subsequently; it was assumed that

four birds recorded by B&M in Yanbu were individuals that had dispersed from this locality and/or other adjacent sites within the Hisma sandstones of north-west Saudi Arabia where the species was also subsequently found. However, this is now considered unlikely as these latter populations (race uncertain but probably either *O. l. lugens* or *O. l. halophila*) are apparently resident and all Yanbu records are probably referable to the race *persica* (see also Jennings 1995).

The subspecies *persica*, which breeds in Iran, is a regular winter visitor in small numbers throughout most of the Arabian Peninsula. Although none of the above birds were handled several were observed at close range and their deep buffish-cinnamon undertail-coverts and brownish-grey speckled crowns and napes indicated *persica*.

FIELDFARE *Turdus pilaris*

One on 16 December 1988 and at least two birds from 6 January – 23 February 1989. One on 29 March 1990. All observations in small parks within MYAS. Not recorded by B & M.

Fieldfares are irregular (not annual) winter visitors to eastern Arabia (rarely as far south as Bahrain) and north-west Arabia (Tabuk).

REDWING *Turdus iliacus*

A small influx within MYAS during the 1991/2 winter: two from 5-16 January feeding on fallen dates in a palm grove and a flock of seven on 20 January. The former were initially discovered by I. Vickors. No records in B & M.

The Redwing is an erratic winter visitor to Kuwait, Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, plus it has occurred on three occasions as far as the lower Gulf in U.A.E. The above records are, however, the first in western Arabia.

RIVER WARBLER *Locustella fluviatilis*

Not recorded by B & M. One hit the author's office window within MYAS on 5 September 1989. The bird was examined in the hand. Rounded, almost graduated tail, relatively long thin bill, faint whitish eye-stripe indicated a *Locustella* warbler. Overall colouration was grey-brown with unstreaked upperparts, diffuse, but obvious, streaks on throat (unlike *fusca* race of Savi's Warbler *L. luscinioides*), plus similar streaks and spots on breast; throat was slightly lighter than rest of underparts; long undertail-coverts were buffish-brown and distinctly tipped off-white. A passage migrant throughout Greater Arabia but rarely recorded because of its secretive behaviour (Porter *et al.* 1996).

OLIVE-TREE WARBLER *Hippolais olivetorum*

One at the Hyatt Hotel, near Yanbu al-Bahr, on 10 August 1990. The bird was seen at close range foraging on the ground and in a low bush. Features noted: a typical *Hippolais* warbler with square-ended tail but much larger than Olivaceous Warbler *H. pallida* (present at same time); distinctive brownish grey upperparts with relatively

huge dagger-like bill, flat crown, white panel and broad fore-supercillium. BSM listed two previous records (once each in spring and autumn). In Arabia considered as a vagrant to Saudi Arabia and Yemen by Porter *et al.* (1996), but more likely to be a regular spring and autumn passage migrant that has been overlooked.

MENETRIES'S WARBLER *Sylvia mystacea*

B & M listed one positive record. However, during 1987-1994 this species (race/s not determined) was a regular winter visitor and passage migrant. It was no doubt significantly under recorded between 1979-1987, in part, due to inadequate field identification guides for the Middle East being available at the time. Extreme dates were 12 October to 12 April with monthly distribution of records as follows: October 2, November 4, December 6, January 5, February 3, March 3 and April 1. Two of the March records involved presumed migrants that were observed in mangroves, which are the first records for this species in this habitat at Yanbu (Meadows 1992). In 1990 a bird stayed in BSM's garden from 28 January to 28 February. A male and a female were also seen in MYAS on 11 February during BSM's visit in 2003.

The species was not listed in Rahmani *et al.* (1994) from the Tihama in Saudi Arabia between Jeddah and Jizzan although Bates (1936-37) mentioned January records from Jeddah. In central and eastern Arabia it is a regular migrant and winter visitor.

It is also likely that some closely related *Sylvia* warblers, particularly Cyprus Warbler *S. melanothorax* and/or Middle East *momus* race of Sardinian Warbler *S. melanocephala* were overlooked or passed over at Yanbu and the status of both species still needs to be determined. To date there are single specimen records for each species in western Saudi Arabia (Goodman & Jennings 1998). Subalpine Warbler *S. cantillans* is also possible in spring, but most Ruppell's Warbler *S. ruepelli*, also a known spring migrant in north-west Arabia, seem to pass further north (closest BSM recorded this species to Yanbu was 280 km away near Al Wedj at 26° 00' N, 36° 30' E).

RED-BREASTED FLYCATCHER *Ficedula parva*

The record in October 1985 (B & M) was the first published record for the central Hejaz and this was followed by a second bird near Masturah (23° 06' N, 38° 50' E), seen by BSM and J. Plunkett on 11 November 1988. Subsequently, in 1992 and 1993, several occurred within MYAS: 1992: one from 2-6 November but three on 3 November, another on 18 November, two on 19 November, one from 20-21 November and one (in a different area to previous sightings) on 25. All these birds (probably at least eight individuals) were seen within the Community Area. 1993: a singleton in mangroves at Conservation Area on 3 November.

A rare migrant and winter visitor to central and eastern Arabia (Jennings 1981). The majority of records, as for Yanbu, are also in late autumn e.g. all pre-1990 records in Bahrain were between October to November (Nightingale & Hill 1993), the only three seen in Riyadh up to 1988 were in November and December (Stagg

1991). The only evidence of spring passage is based on an April record in U.A.E. (Richardson 1990) and a late March bird in Kuwait (Anon. 2001), which could have overwintered.

COLLARED FLYCATCHER *Ficedula albicollis*

One additional spring record: a male in a small park on 27 April 1988. The bird had a complete white collar (i.e. joined around hindneck), a pale rump and larger, more rounded white forehead patch than three male Semi-Collared Flycatchers *F. semitorquata* seen at Yanbu during the same month. There are two previous May records at Yanbu (B & M). Although Jennings (1981) described the species as a rare migrant in western areas of Saudi Arabia, Porter *et al.* (1996) did not mention it as occurring on the mainland of the Arabian Peninsula. It is a regular passage migrant in the Levant.

PYGMY SUNBIRD *Anthreptes metallicus*

First observed in November 1987 when 2-3 individuals were seen in acacia 25 km east of the Yanbu al-Nakl valley close to the abandoned village of Yanbu al-Bekaa. During 1988/90 the species was recorded for the first time at sea-level within MYAS and in each of the four subsequent winters (extreme dates 2 November and 18 March) birds occurred in significant and increasing numbers, visiting flowers (particularly acacias) in now fully-mature private gardens and municipal landscaped areas. Unlike two other Afro-tropical species, African Collared Dove and African Silverbill, that may have been overlooked in the past, the occurrence of Pygmy Sunbirds, at least in the Industrial City from 22 December 1988, was a new phenomenon. In later years birds were heard singing on several occasions and a male was seen in complete breeding plumage on 17 March 1994. These records represent a northerly range extension of approximately 250 km. The only sunbird listed by B & M was the Orange-tufted Sunbird *Nectarinia osea*.

On the Arabian Peninsula, Pygmy Sunbirds are resident in acacia scrub and semi-desert areas of Tihama, foothills and drier parts of the south-west, especially the eastern fringes, extending to eastern Yemen and Dhofar (Jennings 1995).

SHINING SUNBIRD *Nectarina habessinica*

Three were found near Badr Mossayid, 75 km east of MYAS on 13 March 1992. One was also seen by BSM in March 1994 at 1,900 m on Jebel Figrah, and there are other recent records that also indicate a significant range extension for this species north of Taif (Jennings 1995).

Shining Sunbirds are resident with seasonal movement in western and southern Arabia, 250 m – 2,500 m but mostly lower altitudes, wherever dense vegetation occurs (Jennings 1995, Porter *et al.* 1996). In northern Oman and the U.A.E. it is replaced by the closely related Purple Sunbird *N. asiatica*.

STEPPE GREY SHRIKE *Lanius pallidirostris*

Seven birds were identified by BSM and I. Vickors in MYAS during September 1993 (3 on 20, 1 on 21, 2 on 24 and one on 30). The Steppe Grey Shrike, previously considered a race of Great Grey Shrike *L. exubitor*, is now usually given specific status (e.g. Clement 1995). Races of Great Grey Shrikes were not mentioned in B & M. The species breeding within MYAS is *aucheri*, which is now widely accepted as a race of Southern Grey Shrike *L. meridionalis*.

The Steppe Grey Shrike is a passage migrant and winter visitor to the Arabian Peninsula, chiefly in the south and east but has probably been overlooked in west and north-west Arabia. Some could have been mis-identified on occasions in the past for first-winter Lesser Grey Shrikes *L. minor*, particularly due to their long wings, with a long primary projection that approaches Lesser Grey Shrike. All the above birds had even longer tails than *L. minor*, much paler whitish-grey upperparts, more extensive white in wings and white patches on scapulars that are not present in Lesser Grey Shrike. Lesser Grey Shrikes are annual autumn migrants (peaking in early September) to the central Hejaz.

AMETHYST STARLING *Cinnyricinclus leucogaster*

Not recorded in B & M. One male seen exposed near top of a mature fig tree in a small park within MYAS on 7 April 1989. Unmistakable with upperparts and breast glossy violet-blue contrasting with white abdomen indicating adult male. Black bill.

A breeding summer visitor, arrives March in the foothills and drier highlands of western Arabia, usually between 600 – 2,000 m (Jennings 1995) but this is the first record north of Jeddah and was probably a migrant overshoot. It has also occurred in Israel (Shirihai 1996).

COMMON MYNA *Acridotheres tristis*

B & M listed two records (involving three birds). The first bird in 1985 frequented the Sanitary Wastewater Treatment Plant in the Port Area that raises the possibility that it was ship-assisted, as implicated for the spread of the House Crow *Corvus splendens* along the western Arabian coast from Jeddah to Yanbu. Many sightings after 1987, including first breeding record in 1988. It had become well established in the Industrial City and also at Yanbu al-Bahr by 1994 as a relatively common breeding resident with flocks of up to 30 birds.

The species has only recently colonized the Arabian Peninsula presumably, at least initially, by escaped cage birds. There were no records for Saudi Arabia up to April 1981 (Jennings 1981) but it is now a common bird in several urban centres (Jennings 1995), where after establishing viable populations they have apparently spread out to adjacent agricultural areas and smaller towns. For example, in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia it was first found at Dhahran in 1984 (Bundy *et al.* 1989). After a decade it had become established approximately 100 km north-west at Jubail Industrial City and in 2001 two pairs were found breeding (pers. obs.) at an isolated farm separated by 40 km of desert from Jubail. At Riyadh, where the species

first appeared in 1984 (Stagg 1991), it had reached Thumamah, a village 70 km to the north by 1991 (Rietkerk & Wachter 1996), whilst in Oman it has extended its range north-westwards along the Batinah coast from Muscat, as far as Sohar (*per* Davidson & Kirwan 1996). Beyond Greater Arabia it has now spread westwards to Turkey (*per* Kirwan 1999) and Egypt (Millington 2000). Yanbu could have been a possible source area for its recent occurrence in Egypt.

SPANISH SPARROW *Passer hispaniolensis*

Winter visitor but only since winter of 1988/9, particularly to barley packing plants where grain is stored in the open. Extreme dates 10 January –17 March. Largest flock was 450 on 10 January 1992. In Riyadh it was also first recorded in winter of 1988/9 (Stagg 1991). The species' increase in recent years is probably linked with expanding agricultural development in the Arabian Peninsula. It now also breeds annually, for example, in areas with farms in Eastern Province, Saudi Arabia. Several birds were seen at Yanbu al-Bahr between 10-15 February 2003.

AFRICAN SILVERBILL *Euodice cantans*

Not recorded in B & M. There were six records of small flocks (5-23) in the Yanbu al-Nakl valley between 1987 and 1992 during the months of November, January, February and March. The birds were seen in acacia scrub and newly planted open cultivation but, unlike the Indian Silverbill *E. malabarica*, which colonized Yanbu al-Nakl during the 1980's (Meadows 1994b), the species was never found within any of the palm plantations in the valley. In February 2003 BSM again found African Silverbills along the Yanbu al-Nakl valley in both natural acacia steppe and open cultivation.

The African Silverbill is relatively abundant in western and southern Arabia, mainly on the Tihama and drier parts of the highlands. It breeds in the Dhofar but further east, where the extremely arid zone between Dhofar from northern Oman occurs, indigenous populations of African and Indian Silverbills are separated. Along the Tihama it breeds regularly as far north as about the Tropic of Cancer (*pers. obs.*) which is approximately the northern range also of Ruppell's Weaver *Ploceus galbula* – a species not yet observed at Yanbu. In Africa abandoned weaver bird nests are favoured nesting sites.

TRUMPETER FINCH *Bucanetes githagineus*

Trumpeter Finches were found to be thinly, although widely, distributed in the central Hejaz (personal records from Umm Lajj, Medina, Khaybar and Madain Salah). Within 75 km of MYAS it had previously been recorded only at Yanbu al-Nakl (two records in B & M) but during the winter of 1988/9 there was an exceptional influx into the area with birds being attracted, in particular, to two barley packing plants at Yanbu al-Bahr, where grain was being stored in the open. At the barley plants huge flocks (1000 + individuals) were present for several weeks in January and February. These large numbers were seen only during the 1988/9 winter. Cramp & Perrins (1996)

stated that the species has an erratic pattern of movements, abundant in some years and absent in others. It is gregarious outside the breeding season but flocks are not usually large (100, e.g. Jennings 1995) so that these numbers are without precedent.

Discussion

Some of the records listed above clearly reflect range extensions due to previous lack of observations, with Bridled Tern, Nubian Nightjar, African Woodpecker and Shining Sunbird, being cases in point. Others could be due to this or a result of increased agricultural development. Additions in this category include African Collared Dove and African Silverbill. The occurrence of Pygmy Sunbird in Yanbu al-Sinaiyah is definitely the consequence of the provision of flowering plants due to the extensive landscaping that occurred during the final development phase of the city described in the section covering site details.

One outcome of my residency was to document an annual concentrated movement for five species of soaring raptors from late August to November over Yanbu (Meadows 2001). The records of Levant Sparrowhawk confirm that, at least in some years, this species also uses this flyway en-route to Africa.

Some winter visitors, which are annual further north in Greater Arabia, seem to occur only erratically as far south as Yanbu. Additions such as Fieldfare and Redwing fall into this category. In this regard it is worth mentioning that while the Common Starling *Sturnus vulgaris* was seen in four consecutive winters, as from 1982/3, none were observed by BSM between 1986 and 1994.

The occurrence of two Afro-tropical migrants at Yanbu, Abyssinian Roller and Amethyst Starling, could have been due to individuals overshooting their normal range. The inclusion of numerous records of at least one species, Menetries's Warbler, has been due to improved knowledge of field identification criteria that has become available subsequent to publication of B&M.

Finally, additional records of Olive-tree Warbler and Collared Flycatcher, and new records of Cyprus Pied Wheatear, together with confirmation of the nominate race of Red-tailed Wheatear, are in line with the relative annual abundance of other species originating from the eastern Mediterranean Basin that pass through the central Hejaz, such as Black-eared Wheatear *Oenanthe hispanica*, Masked Shrike *Lanius nubicus* and Cretzschmar's Bunting *Emberiza caesia*, as compared with eastern Arabia. A central Asian component is, nevertheless, also well represented at Yanbu.

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Nesting activity of Wallace's Wren *Sipodotus wallacii* in Crater Mountain, Papua New Guinea

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The passerine family Maluridae is comprised of five genera and thirty species restricted to the Australo-Papuan region (Rowley & Russell 1997). The monospecific genera *Clytomyias* and *Sipodotus* and three species of *Malurus* are confined to New Guinea. The other twenty-five species occur in Australia and are relatively well-studied compared to New Guinea species (Schodde 1982, Rowley & Russell 1997).

Although the distribution of Wallace's Wren *Sipodotus wallacii* is locally patchy, it is typically found throughout mainland New Guinea in a narrow zone of foothill